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Creation and Park Playground Facilities



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PLAYGROUNDS: 1987

A Survey of Recreation and Park Playground Facilities



CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

DELINQUENCY PREVENTION COMMISSION



PLAYGROUNDS: 1987

A Survey of Recreation and Park Playground Facilities

June, 1987

**Delinquency Prevention Commissioners
who participated in this survey are:**

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PLAYGROUNDS: 1987

A Survey of Recreation and Park Playground Facilities

OVERVIEW and PURPOSE

The San Francisco Delinquency Prevention Commission undertook this survey of the Recreation and Park Department's playground facilities as part of its long-standing commitment to the development, expansion and improvement of after-school and general recreational programs for San Francisco's children and youth.

The 1986 passage of Proposition "D", the Playgrounds Initiative, made it clear that the people of San Francisco wanted to see a public commitment to the provision of after-school programs for children and youth. The monies provided by Proposition "D" will fund thirty-eight school play-yard and gym programs throughout the city. While this is a great boon to the city's youth, thirty-eight programs have limited overall impact on the recreation needs of the nearly 62,000 children and youth in the city. Most of these programs are focused on providing after-school programs for youth under twelve. Some of the allocated funds will augment current Recreation and Park playground staff, but the funds are not enough to develop the broad network needed to provide free programs for the bulk of this city's children and youth.

In assessing the most economical way to address this serious gap in services, the Recreation and Park run playgrounds stood out as providing the most direct, accessible and cost-effective system to expand/improve/adapt for this particular need.

The playgrounds are a logical first choice for several reasons:

- * Neighborhood availability.
- * Facilities with potential for outdoor play, indoor activities and restrooms.
- * Current staffing to use as the framework on which to build an expanded program.
- * Community credibility.

The Delinquency Prevention Commission wanted to learn what changes would have to be made in current programming and policies to adapt the current system to reflect the expanded focus of providing after-school services.

The following summary of findings, recommendations and commendations provides a non-scientific overview of Recreation and Park playground resources. The members of the Delinquency Prevention Commission believe it might offer some insights and possible direction should the city decide to adapt this resource to address the critical need for low-cost after-school programming in San Francisco.

THE SURVEY

The Delinquency Prevention Commission's survey of Recreation and Park playgrounds focused on three issues:

- * USE: Are the playgrounds being fully utilized by children and youth after-school?
- * PROGRAMMING: What programs are currently offered and how might they be expanded and/or improved to better serve the diverse age groups and neighborhood interests in San Francisco? How might these programs be incorporated into a broad, city-wide network of services?
- * SITE MAINTENANCE/SAFETY: What is the current condition of each site? What's needed?

Fifteen Delinquency Prevention Commissioners visited 63 playgrounds and recreation centers. Most sites were visited on more than one occasion. A rating scale of 1 through 5 was used with one being the best rating. Commissioners evaluated each site for:

- * USE:
Numbers of participants.
Ages of participants.
- * PROGRAMMING:
Programs as described.
Programs as witnessed.

SITE MAINTENANCE/SAFETY:
Building
Fields
Restrooms
Equipment
Atmosphere

The numerical ratings for each site are included on pages 10-13 of this report and are divided by Recreation and Park Department Quadrants. The Commissioners were encouraged to make comments on each site. Recommendations, observations and commendations were developed from these comments. The numerical ratings do not include breakdown of use by each sex at any location. Commentary on these factors is included in the bulk of the report.

The report is organized around these three areas of investigation. Each area is divided into two sections I. Observations/Findings and II. Recommendations. Commendations are found on page 9.

A very faint, light gray watermark-like image of a classical building with four prominent columns and a triangular pediment is visible in the background.

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I.

PLAYGROUND USE: Observations/Findings

MOST PLAYGROUNDS ARE UNDERUTILIZED

While some playgrounds are heavily used (such as Boedekker and the Tenderloin Recreation Center) most facilities seem to be seriously underutilized. This survey was not conducted over a long period of time nor does it pretend to offer statistics revealing total use of any playground or center, however, the Commission found that many centers regularly had only four or five youth playing during what we had supposed would be peak after-school hours between 3:30 and 5PM. These figures were indicative of regular underutilization of major facilities.

SINGLE STAFFING LIMITS PROGRAMMING AND OUTREACH

Single staffing has a serious effect on the success of a program. Only one director on a site limits the breadth of programming possible, resulting in the director focusing on low-organizational outdoor activities. Limitations such as this preclude the possibility of incorporating all ages/sexes/interests in a playground program and curtail the potential for a well-rounded slate of activities.

Single staffing also makes concerted outreach by individual playground personnel nearly impossible. This increases the problem of underutilization of the facilities.

BOYS USE THE PLAYGROUNDS MORE THAN GIRLS

In almost all sites (except the pools) the number of boys using the playgrounds was far greater than the number of girls. Traditionally, team sports have focused on boys. Unfortunately, this still appears to be the case. Playground directors were candid in admitting that, while they thought girls' teams and increased focus on girls' activities would be good, they didn't want to do them. Other directors said that they've love to have girls' teams, but against whom would they compete?

Non-team basketball played by boys was by far the activity most frequently noted by Commissioners in their evaluations.

DRUG-USE/POSSIBLE GANG ACTIVITY

Surprisingly few evaluations noted the overt presence of drug dealing or gangs. In the sites where such activities were witnessed, however, they were a serious problem and prohibited free use of the facility. Directors were sometimes able to keep the dealing on the fringes of the playground/pool facility. Other staff were unable to get help from either the Police Department Gang Task Force or from Recreation and Park officials.

At one site, a Delinquency Prevention commissioner who was conducting this survey, was locked in the bathroom by youths thinking he was a police officer. This level of tension and hostility makes the site unusable by most children.

PLAYGROUND USE: Recommendations

DEVELOP TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS WHICH WOULD INCREASE USE

Coordinate a transportation program with the Unified School District and with contracted bus companies which would allow children to be dropped off at their neighborhood playground or school play-yard site. This would affect children and youth who are bussed to school and who might need some additional assistance/encouragement to use neighborhood programs. It is believed that this would increase overall use of the facilities during after-school hours. A system of accountability would need to be developed which would entail parental permission and the Recreation and Park Department's changing its programming from being entirely drop-in in nature.

CITY-WIDE OUTREACH CAMPAIGN

Expand outreach to the communities. This should not be another component of the site director's job, but should be a city-wide campaign to highlight the playground and school play-yard program.

ELIMINATE SWIMMING FEES FOR CHILDREN UNDER 14

The general observation by pool staff was that fees had dramatically reduced the numbers of children using the pool facilities. Elimination of fees would encourage children to use these expensive facilities. The lost revenues might be realized through increased cost for adult lap-swims etc. (We understand that the Recreation and Park Commission has made similar recommendations and we concur with them.)

EXTEND AFTERNOON HOURS UNTIL 7PM

This is an expensive recommendation. Extending hours at all playgrounds by two hours per day, five days per week would increase costs to the Department by an estimated \$500,000 per year for staff alone. The question must be addressed whether this is the most cost-effective way of significantly expanding the city's after-school resources for children. We believe that it is.

INSTALL RESTROOMS AT BAYVIEW PLAYGROUND AND REOPEN THR FACILITY

This playground has been closed for many years. Temporary bathrooms facilities have been destroyed and removed. The playground's proximity to King Pool makes it a focal point for community recreation activities.

OPEN INDOOR SPACE FOR PROGRAMMING ON RAINY DAYS

An integral component of providing after-school programming is that that programming be available five days per week. Current Rec & Park policy closes the playgrounds on rainy days. Opening these programs would involve a considerable budgetary commitment from the city.

II.

PLAYGROUND PROGRAMMING: Observations/Findings

PROGRAMS DO NOT REFLECT THE NEEDS/INTERESTS OF DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

To a large extent programming is defined by the interests of the site director reflecting neither a centralized policy of the department nor the particular needs of a given community. While some sites stated that they provided a broad range of activities, daily programs witnessed seem to be low-organizational games or boys' team sports.

LIMITED HOURS RESULT IN LIMITED PROGRAMMING

Staff frequently noted that the extremely limited hours at some sites precluded the development of a full range of activities. Like most of us, they could not be in two places at once. When asked, directors were open to more creative programming, but felt that they did not have adequate time or resources to build a more involved agenda.

TALENTS OF SPECIFIC DIRECTORS ARE NOT APPROPRIATELY UTILIZED

Directors with particular expertise or skills (linguistics, art, dance, sports) do not always seem to be assigned to sites where their particular talents would be of greatest use. Making use of these talents increases the potential impact and overall quality of any program.

SITES WERE TOO LARGE FOR A SINGLE DIRECTOR TO MANAGE

Some sites were much too large for one person to adequately oversee. Single staffing at these sites results in reduced safety, extremely limited programming and directors who are difficult to find.

INSUFFICIENT TEEN PROGRAMMING

While many of the youths using the athletic program are teens, there are almost no non-athletic programs which address the needs of this particular population. This age group has free time, relative freedom of movement, enormous energy and many are too young to hold jobs. Programs such as teen centers which provided low-keyed supervision while offering a supportive, constructive environment are needed.

SUPPLIES ARE DIFFICULT TO GET

Directors commented on how hard it was for them to get supplies and materials for programs. The atmosphere in many of the playground buildings was reminiscent of the 1950's. It is doubtful that such environments will be deemed attractive/interesting by children and youth of the 80's.

FEW ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

"Tiny Tots" and team sports for older youth are common programs. The needs of school-aged or latch-key children do not appear to be the priority they should be in Recreation and Park programming. Drop-in programs are not suitable for this age group.

PLAYGROUND PROGRAMMING: RecommendationsPROGRAMMING SHOULD REFLECT THE NEEDS/INTERESTS OF DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

The Department should adapt its programming to better reflect the needs of the richly divergent communities it is mandated to serve. Possibilities for this site-specific programming might include: cooking, vocational-counseling, ethnic music and dance, increased programming for girls and teens.

DOUBLE STAFF OR HIRE "FLOATERS" FOR ENRICHING PROGRAMS

If double staffing of sites is too expensive, the Department might consider the use of regularly scheduled "floaters" to expand programming possibilities. At some sites, this option would still not solve issues of safety arising from single staffing. Double staffing at all sites is the goal.

INCREASED PROGRAMMING FOR GIRLS SHOULD BE MANDATED

Programming for the needs of girls should not be left to the perogative of the site director. Breaking the traditional cycle where girls do not use the playgrounds because they-do-not-play-sports-because-they-were-never-encouraged-to-in-school can be broken. Non-competative team sports both for girls only and co-ed might encourage more playground use by girls. By placing emphasis on fun and the benefits of physical activity, girls' own attitudes about their participation might change. For the many fine young female athletes in the city, a competitave league for all sports should be developed. Co-ed teams should be encouraged.

DEVELOP NON-ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES FOR TEENS

Many of the current playground buildings could be used as teen clubs, offering low-supervision and a safe environment to do homework or participate in a group activity keyed to the specific interests of teens.

INCREASE USE OF VOLUNTEERS FROM OUTSIDE AGENCIES

To increase creative programming, the Department might expand its use of volunteers. When asked, many playground directors were interested in having non-Rec. & Park staff tutors available after-school to assist with homework. It is possible that if children/youth come to the playgrounds to do their homework, they might participate in other programming as well and vice-versa.

PROGRAMMING SHOULD BE DEPARTMENTAL POLICY

An essential aspect in revising programming is the development of a strong core of activities for each age group/sex etc. Each playground would be required to offer a given percentage of these programs from each category. This requirement would limit the impact that any director's own interests might have on the quality of a program. We witnessed that impact on girls' programming, it might also affect other aspects of the activities offered.

INCREASE SUPPORT FOR STAFF

Improve communication between playground staff and administration. Respond more quickly to requests for assistance regarding drugs/gangs and to requests for materials, supplies and repairs.

III.

PLANT MAINTENANCE/SAFETY: Observations/Findings

MINOR REPAIRS ARE NEEDED THROUGHOUT THE CITY

Relatively minor repairs ranging from broken basketball hoops to broken bathroom fixtures are common complaints throughout the city. More expensive improvements such as broken pavement and splintered wood-play equipment were also widespread. Kitchen equipment was often unusable.

Many buildings were depressing because they needed repainting and updating. Playing fields were generally in excellent condition as were many gyms and gym floors. This underscored the general perception that athletic programming was a higher departmental priority.

QUALITY OF OVERALL SITE MAINTENANCE VARIED WIDELY

Some sites were beautifully maintained with well kept buildings, fields and plantings while others were in terrible condition. The most poorly maintained sites were in the Mission, Oceanview and Hayes Valley. These three areas are among the poorest in the city with the fewest recreational resources and fewest options available for children.

SITE DIRECTORS WERE DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY

Most directors wore no identifying article of clothing. It is imperative for the safety of children that they be able to identify the playground staff. It is also thought that easy identification might increase staff accessibility to children unfamiliar with the playground or facilities.

PLANT MAINTENANCE/SAFETY: Recommendations

REQUIRE THAT STAFF BE EASILY IDENTIFIED

Require that playground staff wear an identifying piece of clothing such as a T-shirt or hat. Some employees have jackets and others attach a badge to their clothing, but it should be standardized throughout the playgrounds.

RECTIFY INCONSISTENCIES BETWEEN LEVEL OF PLAYGROUND MAINTENANCE

Because of neighborhood problems, certain facilities may be more expensive to maintain than others. In spite of this situation, the children in these areas must be provided with facilities comparable to those in other areas.

IV.

PLAYGROUND USE, PROGRAMMING, SAFETY: Commendations

FIELDS WERE GENERALLY IN EXCELLENT SHAPE THROUGHOUT THE CITY

Clearly the Department has invested a great deal of money in resurfacing playing fields and gyms. The problems with fields appeared to reflect heavy use or weather as opposed to lack of maintenance.

MANY CARING, COMMITTED DIRECTORS

While there were a number of directors who did not relate well to the children, many more were happy with their jobs and requested supplies, materials and repairs to improve their abilities to work with the children and youth.

RECENT STAFFING CHANGES IN ADMINISTRATION

The Department has recently made some staffing appointments in its administration which we believe will enable it to expand its traditional definition of "recreation".

IMPROVED COMMUNICATION WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS

The Department's stronger working relationship with other departments can only improve the city's overall ability to provide for the recreational needs of youth.

EXCELLENT AQUATICS FACILITIES

The pool facilities are uniformly beautifully maintained. It is unfortunate that children are unable to make better use of them.

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SUMMARY OF SURVEYS

PLAYGROUND SURVEY: EVALUATIONS

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